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SUBJECT: TFGG01 Ukrainian Media on Georgian Conflict

11. (SBU) Summary: Ukrainian media is split on its coverage of the conflict in Georgia, which occupied the front page of Ukrainian newspapers this week and featured prominently on broadcast and on-line media. Pro-Western and pro-presidential periodicals denounced Russia's support for separatist regions in Georgia and accused Russia of imperialism and indiscriminate use of force. Papers leaning toward the opposition as well as those associated with Prime Minister Tymoshenko claimed the conflict was provoked by Georgia and focused on the suffering of South Ossetia's population. Not surprisingly, the two camps drew different lessons for Ukraine: one urged rapid NATO membership, while the other called for neutrality and warned against provoking Russia. Additionally, some media was critical about the absence of a public statement by the Prime Minister. (Note: While Ukrainian print media and television have been relatively balanced in their reporting, many Ukrainians have access to Russian television stations, which present a very different picture.)

12. (SBU) Print Media

Pro-Western Den's senior international correspondent Mykola Siruk stated in an article August 13 that Moscow wants "full control over Georgia." He called Russia "hypocritical" for blaming "Georgian aggression" as the cause of the conflict and rejected Russia's characterization of its actions as "peacekeeping." Another Den journalist, Yurii Raikhel, compared Russia's policy regarding South Ossetia to Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938 under the pretext of defending Sudeten Germans (August 12). In an article August 14, Raikhel ridiculed Russia for trying to pin the term "aggressor" on Georgia. He commented on the outcome of hostilities, stating that Russia had lost politically, diplomatically, financially and militarily (claiming that Russia's military was inefficient).

13. (SBU) Deputy chief editor of the pro-Yushchenko Ukraina Moloda Dmytro Lykhovii, in an opinion piece headlined "The Russia That I Hate" (August 12), wrote: "The Russian bear opened a new page on military 'victories': tanks on foreign territory, the bombing of sovereign Georgia, the killing of hundreds of Georgian citizens, and a massive propaganda attack based on the most brutal lies -- this is what Russia's first war in the third millennium looks like." He concludes that "Caucasus developments are additional proof of how vital it is for Ukraine to join NATO."

14. (SBU) These opinions are seconded by the Russian-language "Gazeta po-Kievski" (August 14) which sees the ceasefire as a Russian defeat, urges a fast decision by NATO on Ukraine's and Georgia's Membership Action Plans and hails the unity of and "victory in the stand-off with Russia" by Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, whose leaders rallied in Tbilisi in solidarity with Georgia. Both Gazeta po-Kievski (August 13) and Ukraina Moloda, as well as Hazeta24 (August 14), lashed out against Prime Minister

Tymoshenko for her failure to denounce Russian aggression against Georgia.

15. (SBU) Some newspapers that supported Georgia and criticized Russia nevertheless published opinion pieces running counter to the general editorial line. For example, Hazeta24 (August 13) prints opinions by European experts, who despite pressure from the journalist, refused to hold Russia solely responsible for the hostilities. Arkady Moshes of the Finnish Institute of International Relations opined that "based on the precedent of air strikes against Serbia that ultimately led to Kosovo independence, it is very easy for Russia to argue it is acting in the same manner in Georgia...In any case, people will take a look at who fired the first shot. In this case the first shot was not from the Russian side. And this fact is impossible to conceal." Alexander Rahr, a member of the German Council on Foreign Policy, said that, unlike in the U.S., in Europe many view with understanding the Russian move to go into South Ossetia to stop the bloodshed.

16. (SBU) Den, August 14, put on the front page an opinion piece by Ihor Slisarenko who, while blaming Russia for masterminding the conflict, stated that "Russia not only scored a regional military and political victory, but also forced the West to take into account its own 'Monroe doctrine'." Gazeta po-Kievski, in the same article that accused Russia of imperialism, expressed hope that the war in Georgia would "force world leaders to review the rules of the game in contemporary world. Because, if the U.S. can do anything it pleases in Iraq, if today Europe recognizes Kosovo's independence, then these geopolitical players will have followers."

17. (SBU) Segodnya daily, owned by one of the leaders of the Regions Party, Rinat Akhmetov, in several articles published August 12-14, urged Ukraine to keep clear of any involvement in the Georgian

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conflict, warning that involvement would split Ukraine. An opinion column by anti-Western commentator Oles Buzyna (August 12) blamed the U.S. for the actions of Georgian President Saakashvili that provoked the war. Vechernie Vesti, associated with Prime Minister Tymoshenko, carried a large article (August 13) surprisingly critical of President Saakashvili and of pro-Americanism of the part of Ukrainian leadership: "The war in the Caucasus sent shivers down the spine not only because of compassion with the civilian population of Georgia and Ossetia. The open games of Bankova with the White House, the eloquent threats by the Ukrainian MFA to prevent the Russian Black Sea Navy's ships from returning to Crimea after patrolling the Russian-Georgian border, have given rise to fear among our citizens of deliberate or inadvertent involvement of our country in war. Controversial actions by Ukrainian politicians who talk about a peaceful settlement of the Caucasus conflict in fact only aggravate the already tense relations with Russia and encourage American policies... One is really scared when one realizes where, God forbid, Ukraine's foreign policy could lead us with its desire to get into NATO at any cost."

18. (SBU) Kievskie Vedomosti, in an essay by Yevgenii Yakunov (August 13), painted an unattractive portrait of Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili, ascribed to the Georgian people an intrinsic characteristic of producing unbalanced passionate leaders, and warned Ukraine of the danger of "becoming cannon fodder in someone else's war."

Broadcast Media

19. (SBU) Ukrainian primetime TV coverage of the Georgian conflict has been mostly straightforward and balanced, covering a wide range of viewpoints (ranging from Russia saying early in the conflict that Ukraine has no moral grounds to mediate in the South Ossetian conflict to the U.S. President Bush statement of strong support for Georgia). In addition to factual reporting, primetime comments included those by Leonid Kravchuk, Ukraine's first President, saying to television's One Plus One on August 10 that "a game by superpowers is taking place in the Caucasus, and the game intends to push Russia aside from the position it used to hold there before."

Russia is not going to give in, whereas the United States and western countries will try to push Russia aside. So, leaders of the Caucasus should take this into consideration, particularly Saakashvili..."

¶10. (SBU) Anatoly Grytsenko, chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Defense and National Security, and ex-Defense Minister, said on Channel Five (August 13), "To make an assessment of what has happened one has to distance oneself from the principle 'friend or foe' or 'aggressor and victim.' I am in solidarity with the people of Georgia, who became the victims of war. However, I'd like to say that I can't be in solidarity with the actions by President Saakashvili, who resorted to the use of force to resolve the conflict. It's true he has been provoked. But a statement and state policy are about remaining cool. He resorted to the use of force and ended with a tragic result for the country. One may say absolutely that these two republics (South Ossetia, Abkhazia) will never return to the jurisdiction of this country (Georgia) whatever active measures the international community, including Ukraine, tries to use. Also I'd like to add that the use of rocket launchers is not acceptable in the third millennium, and such actions should be punished... On the other hand, Russia has resorted to an act of war, an act of aggression. It has attacked Georgia from all three spheres: land, water, and air, and it is war, it is the violation of the international war. It should be condemned, and I regret that so far our leadership has failed to call it aggression."

On-Line Media

¶11. (SBU) UNIAN carried an article titled "Caucasian Crisis: Lessons for Ukraine" written by Yengen Magda (August 11). The author argues that this crisis is not simply a conflict between Russia and Georgia, but could result in a serious change in the European map and Ukraine should prepare for this. Magda suggests that Kyiv should check how many Crimeans have Russian passports. Magna also states that the conflict is Russia's response to Kosovo's independence, that Kyiv cannot effectively influence the situation in Georgia because of future gas negotiations with Russia, and that Georgia now will try to receive guarantees to join NATO quickly. Further, Magda says that the conflict may help Ukraine join NATO and that recent events have proved that Ukraine needs a mobile and effective army. This, he says, could result in change of the Minister of Defense, as Yekhanurov is not a professional military man. Finally, Magda stresses that Ukraine should revise its policy in Crimea. <http://unian.net/ukr/news/news-266586.html>

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¶12. (SBU) In Obozrevatel ("How We Can Prevent War with Russia?" August 13), Dmitriy Bielianskiy argues that Russia's goal is not to occupy Georgia but to get rid of Saakashvili and that nobody can really prevent Russia from doing it: neither NATO, nor the USA, UN, EU, G7 could do anything except issue statements. The author writes that Ukraine is not a united country and this could result in the same situation as in Georgia. The main question now, in the author's opinion, is how to prevent war with Russia. He proposes two ways: further promote NATO in Ukraine as the only way to protect Ukraine's sovereignty or a second approach (a paradoxical one, according to the author) would be to refuse to join NATO and to accept the Russian language as a second official language. http://www.obozrevatel.com/news/2008/8/13/253_456.htm

¶13. (SBU) Ukrains'ka Pravda carried an analytical piece entitled, "Ukraine Is Next?" by Oleksandr Sushko, Scientific Director of the Institute of Euro Atlantic Co-operation. The author argues that this is a Russian war for a new world order and if Russia wins this war there won't be a place for Ukraine as a sovereign country. The author points out the weaknesses of the West, saying there are no leaders any more like Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher who would call things by their names. The author expresses the same sentiment as in the above-mentioned article, namely that in order to prevent war, Ukraine has two choices: join NATO as soon as possible or join Russia. <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2008/8/12/79803.htm>

¶14. (SBU) In "Russia against Georgia: Revival of the Empire," the

author claims that the main goals of Russia are to prevent Georgia from joining NATO and to prevent the creation of "non-Russian" means to transport energy. According to the author, the war in Georgia makes it impossible for Georgia to receive a Membership Action Plan.

The author writes about ways to protect Ukraine from the same situation: to join NATO, to remove the Russian Black Sea fleet, to coordinate information space, and to control the situation in Crimea. [http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2008/8/12/79832 .htm](http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2008/8/12/79832.htm)

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